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ABSTRACT

Career guidance and employment are the focus of this transcript of a radio series broadcast by the National Public Radio System entitled "Can You Get There from Here?" The third of a 4-part series on the relationship between schooling and jobs, this program centers around conversations with William Harwood of New Schools Exchange, and Willard Wirtz, former Secretary of Labor and author of "The Boundless Resource." The role of schools is examined on the question of relevancy to jobs and whether they should be training young people to do certain kinds of work, and if so, which people will receive training for which jobs. Other topics discussed are the relationships of schools with family and community. (TA)

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TRANSCRIPT
WEEK OF JANUARY 19, 1976

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is an electronic weekly magazine devoted to coverage of news, features, policy and people in the field of education. This transcript focuses on two conversations about career guidance and employment:

William Harwood, New Schools' Exchange 1-13
Willard Wirtz, former Secretary of Labor, author of The Boundless Resource 15-19

Reporters: John Merrow, Barbara Newman; co-host, Wendy Blair

This week's program is the third in a series of four programs on the relationship between schooling and jobs, "Can You Get There From Here?" and is available for broadcast by National Public Radio's 181 member stations the week of January 19.

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CE 008 676

BLAIR: Options in Education is a news magazine about all the issues and ideas in education, from the abc's of pre-school to the alphabet soup of government programs. I'm Wendy Blair, and this week on Options in Education John Merrow and I continue a four-part series on schooling and jobs: "Can you Get There From Here?"

Let's take a quick look at where we have been in this series so far. On the first program James O'Toole, of the Center for the Study of the Future, described the millions of Americans who are over-educated, underemployed, and frustrated because they are finding that a college degree is no guarantee of either a job or job satisfaction. He argues that while unrealistic expectations need to be curbed, the jobs that have to be done can also be changed. On program two anthropologist Elliot Leibow spoke up for those who are not college bound, pointed to the social waste of unemployment and called for a national policy of full employment.

MERROW: This week and next we'll focus a little more sharply on the schools themselves, especially on the question of career preparations. Should the schools be training young people to do certain kinds of work? And if so, which people get trained for which jobs?

HARWOOD: Schools shape people's attitudes about work. Basically the attitude is that you have it made if you don't have to work and you have lots of material possessions and money to throw around. And being able to do something useful is a valuable thing which our schools don't particularly harp on, don't even ever mention and in fact fight against. Anyway, what I am thinking is that a lot of people who are doing work in America realize that what they are doing isn't important and a lot of people who are going to school realize that what they do in the future -- what they are looking for is not a job, but a hussle. They are not looking for work: they are looking for a way to make money and not have to work. It is a different thing than work. And what I'm saying is that schools and the general society values, which the schools only reflect, have a lot to do with why people are looking for hussle rather than work.

BLAIR: That is William Harwood of the New Schools Exchange, a clearing house for ideas and information about alternative education. Our format continues an experiment we began last week. We asked Bill Harwood to listen and then react to a series of interviews which John taped with workers in a small Ohio town. The first voice you'll hear is that of a young motel clerk who has discovered that after checking people in and out, and dusting the lobby, she has an awful lot of time on her hands.

There's some days it is, you know, super boring. But you have to make the best of it. You have to be here. This gives you a lot of time for yourself, you know. I like it, you know. I'd rather stay here than to go look for something else that paid more.

MERROW: Do you demand something from a job?

I guess just to be treated like people. I wouldn't want to be stepped on all the time around here. One day is bad enough if you have a grouchy customer. I wouldn't want it everyday, though. You can't say what you think, you know, or it wouldn't look too good on the place. You smile and grit your teeth, you know.

MERROW: When you were in school, did you think that you would be working?

Gee, that's hard to say because I was planning on being married anyway. I don't know. The first job I had before I was married and then I just had to quit it because we moved, so I didn't have much choice than to change jobs. But, you know, we live right around here. We both work around here, so we should be here for a long time.

MERROW: Did school prepare you for working?

Well, for a girl at school you either took Business or that was about it, really, because that was the most big credit-wise thing. I didn't want to go to college or anything.

MERROW: Are you using those business skills in this job?

I suppose, yes. I type some, you know, and the adding machine and all that stuff, you know, that comes in.

MERROW: Someday you may have kids and maybe they will be girl kids and they will go through school. Will you tell them anything different about working?

Just do what you like, if you don't like it, get out. Just don't force yourself to have to go and be unhappy all the time. We had a certain manager where I wouldn't want anybody to work under. But they are gone and now it is a lot different. But even I was thinking of moving on. I didn't want to, but some people you just can't get along with. I would just tell them to do what you are happy with and don't force yourself to go in just because of the money and everything.

MERROW: It sounds for you as if work is supplemental, that your husband's job comes first.

Yes, well, he makes a lot more than I do. Mine just gives us extra money for whatever, extra little goodies that we want. But here lately, you know, it is kind of rough. But what the heck, it will get better.

MERROW: You are an optimist.

You've got to be. You've got to be.

HARWOOD: Do jobs require education? I was thinking here, you've got a desk clerk in a motel and you can teach her everything she needs to know in an hour and a half. She already knows how to read and write and type. You can pre-suppose that and that she has a reasonable grasp of how to deal with people as people. But that is about all it pre-supposed. It doesn't require any particular training.

The second thing I wrote down was: What does work mean to most people? I think that is what work means to most people in modern America. There are 82 million workers and probably 80 million of them do things that are just jobs, you know, you go in, they tell you what to do, it doesn't make any sense, it doesn't have anything to do with your life, you do it. If you don't like it, you can leave and get another job that doesn't have anything to do with anything.

MERROW: But she seemed reasonably satisfied, wouldn't you say?

HARWOOD: Well, sure, that is all people expect out of jobs. People don't expect a job that changes the world or does something which fulfills them internally. They expect a job which pays x amount of money and has a lot of security, she mentioned that. Security is a big word in that kind of thing.

MERROW: She said, "I'd rather stay here than look for something else. It's steady."

HARWOOD: Yes, "steady," it pays the bills, gives us extra goodies.

MERROW: We shouldn't let that woman in the motel, let her go by without talking about her as a woman.

HARWOOD: Yes.

MERROW: And what the schools and perhaps the rest of society have taught her to expect from work. She said, "Well, I was planning on being married. I didn't have much choice in school. For a girl there is no choice; you take business courses."

HARWOOD: Well, she said she took business courses because she didn't want to go to college. There is several kinds of sorts that happen in college. We do what we call tracking and in some places they do it overtly and in some places they do it covertly. But basically you have the dumb class and the kids who are going to college. That is the first sort. You are either a college-prep or you're a dummy. If you're a dummy, that means that you take courses that teach you how to do a job. If you're a woman that means you take courses to be a cosmetician, you take Home Ec., you take business courses, you learn to be a nurse. I don't know. You've got x amount of choices in any public school. And they set the curriculum up to shape people into this thing. The discrimination beyond that is phenomenal.

MERROW: I think the next piece we are going to listen to, Bill, touches on and shows the beginning awareness of that man-woman kind of thing. These are two people who are working at a -- this is not an advertisement -- these are two people who are working at a local McDonalds restaurant.

How long have you been a manager of McDonalds?

Not quite two years now.

MERROW: What's particularly challenging about working in the restaurant business, the fast food business?

To me it's the people that work for us. Mostly, it is almost 90 percent high school kids. There is something different that happens everyday. There's problems every five minutes you have to help them out with or they help you out with. It's just amazing. You get a whole different insight on high school people here than the people that you see on the street.

MERROW: How is it different?

Usually the people that want to work and that have to work and they enjoy working, it is a whole new breed of people; those aren't the people you see roaming the campus. The people that want to work are really good solid basic people that are going to go on to college or they

are going to take over their Dad's business or they are going on in the restaurant business and they really enjoy working. And I enjoy working with them.

MERROW: So you're getting a different perspective on young people?

Oh, yes. My opinion of young people has done a 180 degree turn around in the last two years.

We all do the same job and we have fun at it. We all do the same things. We greet our customers. We fill their orders and take their money and have a nice day. Most of the guys I know now work. I wouldn't know of any that didn't. I mean, you know, I think now that working is just part of a teenager's life. It's something that they do just naturally, like something, you know, they were grown up to do. Working is a part of their teenage life.

MERROW: That is true for you also?

Yes, it is.

MERROW: Is this your first job?

No, it isn't. It is my third job.

MERROW: That noise in the background was the French fries. When you go back to school, do you talk at all in any academic situations about working?

Yes, in business classes, like Typing, Record Keeping, General Business, things like this.

MERROW: There is a young woman in the motel down the street who looks back bitterly, I would say bitterly, on her high school experiences -- I don't know if it was a local high school -- and the corner she was pushed into just taking business courses and the dead-end job she has gotten into. Do you have any fear that that might happen to you?

Well, not really, because I don't take business courses anymore. I had enough of that from just my ninth and tenth grade years. Really, that is about the only thing you can take unless you're in some type of after-school club or something that gets into things deeper. But it is not, an academic club is nothing for school credit. And Business is about the only thing you can go into instead of Arts or Music or something like that.

MERROW: What do you think will happen to you after high school? What do you think you'll do?

I am planning on going to college. I hope that's what's going to happen to me.

MERROW: Why? What do you think you'll do after college?

Well, I want to go into the nursing field. About the only thing I can take right now in high school is Psychology, Sociology, Chemistry, Science and things like that that will prep me for college. But it won't prep me for a job right after school.

MERROW: So you are waitressing your way, you are whiling away your time serving one of the 17 billion McDonalds.

Yeah, but it's fun. I enjoy the work.

MERROW: That is important. Thank you very much.

Thank you.

MERROW: A waitress at McDonalds.

HARWOOD: The difference that strikes me about those two women is their activity level. One of them sits in a motel and x number of people come in. But I mean out of an eight-hour shift she probably works 45 minutes or an hour. And I would guess that when she goes home she watches TV and she has a lot of time to sort of sit around and think about things. The other one gets up at 7:00 in the morning, goes to high school, does her courses, gets out of school, goes to work at McDonalds, gets out of McDonalds, does her homework and goes to sleep. And it is fairly obvious that being active is stimulating and that being active also keeps you from realizing the shape of the position you've gotten yourself into in the world.

MERROW: According to the manager and according to the waitress, the kids who were working there were college-bound kids. The girl said, "Working is part of a teenager's life." But McDonalds was having people who in fact were passing the time. That girl, hopefully anyway, wasn't learning skills that she's going to use later on; she was making some money. What about the kids who aren't college-bound? I wonder what kind of jobs they had while they were in school.

HARWOOD: First of all, I don't want to skip over the point of college-bound and assume it means anything in particular. There is a nice book called, "The Great Training Robbery." It documents very concisely the fact that education doesn't necessarily mean that you'll make more money, that you'll have a better job, that you'll do more productive work or anything else. After the Lyndon Johnson era, the HEW, social services development, it has been possible for all American boys to go to college and all American girls, too. This has been done through a tremendous amount of financial aid.

The point of all this story is that all of those people who went to college don't necessarily, number one, find their education any more relevant to their lives than the people who have been to high school; and number two, do any better at making money than the people who don't. But, okay, you're right, we sort out the kids, those who are going to college and the dummies. And what happens to the dummies? Well, lots of things happen to the dummies. They get jobs in construction crews, factories.

MERROW: The point ought to be made though, I mean you're making the point, that schools have a structure where they are set up to do best for the kids who are theoretically going on to more schooling. Schooling prepares you for more schooling. And you drop out along the way. You are sorted out in a negative kind of way. There isn't a point in school where someone can choose or a choice is made that you are going to go in a vocational direction and that's good or you're going to go in a college direction and that's good. It is not done that way. If you're good you get to go on to more and more school.

HARWOOD: Right.

MERROW: I think in the first program in this series, talking about the phenomenon of underemployment, the extent to which people are coming out of college and discovering that in fact there aren't the kind of jobs waiting for them that they'd been led to believe would be there, and there is a real kind of backlash of awareness and even resentment.

HARWOOD: And there is also tens of millions of people who have big college loans to pay off and realize that they wasted four, six, or seven years of their lives doing things which never made any sense to them on the presupposition that they would get these good jobs which now apparently do not exist. We have a million and a half people with teaching degrees who can't find jobs and are looking for jobs, according to one study.

MERROW: Maybe schools would do better if they simply, if they could prepare all of us to read, write and work with numbers and not stress certain kinds of job training or not worry so much about sorting all of us. The further I get into this, Bill, the murkier I get.

HARWOOD: Well, I think that what the schools should concentrate on doing is giving people a sense of their own history, skills in reading, writing, arithmetic, et cetera, and their own history should include how they fit into the human race. It should give them things that we don't consider adequate, of adequate importance to people's lives, which will be cultural and artistic. It should give people a sense of music, a sense of art, a sense of themselves as something else besides a person who performs a function, you know, a machine. It should also give people the kind of hard skills that prepare them for specialized jobs.

MERROW: Like what?

HARWOOD: But in a general context. Say you want someone to be a chemist, you have to teach them chemistry. You don't have to teach them how to write a PhD. about chemistry; you have to teach them how to work with chemistry. But if I was Dow Chemical and I wanted to hire someone who was a chemist, it doesn't make any difference to me whether he has a PhD. in Chemistry. I can take him down to the lab and find out in ten minutes whether he knows anything about chemistry, I mean, mix me up some asprin. There is no problem whatsoever in testing whether a person knows something if you really have a job for him to do that requires that. And at the same time you can probably teach them to particularize things that they need to do to work in your thing, just as you go along what they call on-the-job training or in a short training course or periodic short training courses.

So what I think the schools should probably do is get out of the work bag completely and concentrate on what we used to call general liberal education, that is giving the person a grasp of what this world is like and how they fit into it. And you might have a course in vocational preparation. But I think that primarily that job should be put back on industry and back on the world and we should concentrate on developing a whole person in our schools and not training workers.

MERROW: That whole person, of course, has to know that he or she is going to work and what to expect from work, what kind of demands.

HARWOOD: In the course of a conversation about what goes on in the world and what you need to be able to do and think about in a liberal education, that comes up.

MERROW: It comes up in this next piece, too. We have a father and a son who are both talking about jobs and particularly the son, worrying about his own future.

How long have you been manager of this gas station?

Four years.

MERROW: What did you do before that?

Excavating. It's good work but I just wanted to get out of it because, just like anything else, I just wanted to get into something like this here.

MERROW: Why?

Oh, I like to be around the public, deal with the public, really, mainly. That is the main reason. You know, you just got to know how to take people, I guess. I mean it is just something that is born in you, I guess. I don't know how to explain it really. It is just to understand people.

MERROW: Did you have to go to school to qualify to be a manager of a gas station?

Yes. It takes about a month of schooling.

MERROW: What did they teach you? What did they tell you?

Bookkeeping the first two weeks and the second two weeks a little bit of TBA and salesman.

MERROW: You'd better tell us what TBA is.

TBA is tires, batteries, and accessories.

MERROW: How about kids? Do you have kids of your own?

Yes.

MERROW: Do you ever talk about work to them?

Not really, not to really get down and talk to them about it, no.

MERROW: Do you suppose kids growing up today have any better idea about what work means than you did when you were a kid?

Kids today, I don't think, really know what it is to, you know, what it is now to work and what it was back then. It is a lot harder now because there is not as many jobs.

MERROW: Do you think kids ought to be prepared better in someway for changing jobs, for the fact that life is complicated?

Yeah, I think a person ought to know, you know, at least, I would say, at least three or four different skills, really. It is like me, if something would happen here I can always go back to excavating or I can go back into contracting work. That is what my Dad was in for 35 years.

MERROW: How about your kids? Are they acquiring skills in school?

I've got one right there, a stepson right there. He's trying to learn this here. Like I say, they ought to know at least three or four different things, you know, in order to get by in this world today. Because it's rough. I think we all know that.

MERROW: Do you think the schools are doing that?

No, not really. I don't think they are. They are just preparing them, just. you know, if you can go out and get a job, get it, you know. But I don't think they are really what you call preparing the kids for it, no.

MERROW: And this is the stepson you just referred to. I guess you're a trainee here.

Yes, I am just learning, trying to learn a little bit about cars and stuff.

MERROW: And you're in school still?

Yeah, I am a senior at Hayes.

MERROW: What do you think you'll do when you finish high school?

I'll probably stay here and learn as much as I can. I don't know after that. I might go to technical school or something.

MERROW: How about your buddies in school?

As far as what kind of jobs they are looking for, a lot of them are working at gas stations, at least most of my friends are. I know a lot have to do with cars. Really, that is about the thing to get into.

MERROW: You are 17 now? Do you have any sense of what you will be doing when you're 50?

Well, hopefully, I would like to get into recording.

MERROW: What kind of recording?

Oh, just producing, maybe, or something like that.

MERROW: What makes you want to do that?

I like music a lot, a whole lot. That doesn't have anything to do with gas stations or anything, but that's just like a hope or something.

MERROW: Well, do you have any training along those lines?

Not too much. I'm in a band but, you know, it is not anything with producing. Well, it is producing sort of, but not recording or

anything like that.

MERROW: So that is a lot of learning on your own?

Yeah.

MERROW: A lot of the adults I've talked to indicated that basically they've sort of backed into careers. They haven't walked into things with their eyes open and firmly set on their goal, but they've ended up doing something and have backed out of that into something else. And there is a whole series of accidents. Are you prepared for that kind of life?

Well, I'm not really prepared for it, but how can I stop it? That is going to happen to just about everybody probably sooner or later.

MERROW: Maybe it doesn't have to happen. Maybe there could be a way in high school that kids could be prepared for finding out who they are, finding out what their real values are, and making some kind of career choices on that basis.

Yeah, that's possible but I don't know, especially kids nowadays, they don't really plan, you know, they don't plan. Really. They just go to school and whatever becomes of it becomes of it. They don't really know. I know I am just hoping that it will turn out for the best. I am starting to worry now because I'm at that age, you know, where you want to get something that's going to pay good, that is going to give you good skills. But you never know. I'm hoping. I'm hoping for this. Mechanics get paid really good money.

MERROW: Do you enjoy this?

Yes, I do.

MERROW: What do you like about it?

Oh, just about everything. The only thing I don't like is cleaning up.

MERROW: You only have to do that once a day.

Yes, just at closing.

HARWOOD: Well, that was a much more interesting tape. There you have a fellow who has quite an active mind. For some reason he's fairly well aware of his situation and his future possibilities which are dim and chancy. He has a real developed personal interest in music which he is aware that the educational system in the society have no interest whatsoever in helping him develop.

On the one hand, he was quite clear that in his own situation where he did have an aim and he was a future-oriented person and he was fairly aware of what was going on and definitely a practical kind of person, there was no way for him to affect the process. He had a feeling of helplessness. It was clear that him as a kid wasn't going to do anything about this big system. You know, it just was going to happen to everybody. That's one of the things he said. But when you suggested that the school might be relevant to his interests and might change to meet the

interesting patterns of kids, he said, "Well, I think kids just don't plan today." That is one thing we have been trained to do. He didn't say, well, the principal doesn't or the school board doesn't or the teachers don't, or the State U. doesn't. He said, "the kids." That was a very subtle little shift there. What I'm saying is that we have to assess what the schools or any institution can or can't do for us and what is the responsibility of the family and what's the responsibility of the state, and we have to clarify those things.

MERROW: That father we just heard said he felt the schools should be, that kids should learn three or four trades so that they'll be prepared because it is a rough world. Well, it strikes me on its face that it is not possible for a school to teach me or you or anybody else three or four trades by the end of high school.

HARWOOD: I don't believe that. I think it would be possible to teach kids quite a number of vocations by the end of high school.

MERROW: Within school?

HARWOOD: Well, not within the school building in a classroom. I don't think you can learn how to do anything in particular in a school classroom. But, by the time I finished school now--I was born on a farm. I was a pretty good farmer by the time I was 12 years old. I also, incidentally, picked up pretty good skills at mechanics. I knew how to weld. I knew how to operate almost any machine.

MERROW: You are not telling me you learned those in school, though.

HARWOOD: No, I learned them out of school. But what I'm saying is that if you address the school program to the idea of learning how to do useful trades, it wouldn't be any trouble at all to take the existing resources and the existing teachers and address them to that thing and teach kids a half a dozen trades by the time they finished high school and they could have some work experience on each one. It is amazing what you can learn on a job as a carpenter's apprentice in six months, especially if you're backed up by the shop teacher at school who's teaching kids to operate machinery, who's teaching them the theoretical basis, who's teaching them about materials, who's teaching them the theoretical basis, drawing. It is absolutely amazing what you can teach any kid in a six month or a year period. You could take, say, one vocation a year. If that was the aim of the schools, I think they could do that.

What I'm saying is that we have to have a focus about what the school can do and if that focus suited that particular community or that particular father or that particular kid, I think the school could fulfill that function fine.

Take the question of reading a book. If you pick up a book that is something that you are interested in, you read it, right? I remember one time sitting in a Baker's Dozen Restaurant in a college town and a guy was reading this book and it was like 2:00 in the morning, you know. He was reading this book. He said, "You know, Bill, I have been reading this book for a day and a half. Every chance I get I open this book and read it. If the teacher told me to read it, I'd throw it in a trash can." When something grows organically out of your interest and you feel like you really want to do it, it's easy. When somebody assigns you to do it, it

is work.

MERROW: Okay, I won't argue with that. But aren't you doing the same kind of thing that you are accusing colleges of doing, and I accuse colleges of doing, that is creating false expectations in people? If you go around saying, somehow implying that the best kind of job is the thing you love to do, that is not going to be possible. If there are 82 million workers in this country, for 70 million of them they are not going to have jobs that are interesting and challenging and exciting.

I think you can pretty well establish that people want something from their jobs beside that. They want a steady job. They want some kind of job security. They want to be paid a living wage. They want some sense that it is important work, that they are not just moving a pile of bricks from one side of the room to the other side of the room. They also perhaps want a pension when they are finished. They want health care. But I don't think it's fair to somehow condition a whole lot of young people that they don't have a good job unless that job turns them on.

HARWOOD: Well, see, I think that is bloody nonsense. I think that the kind of things that people want to do are coupled with what needs to be done in this society. And the kind of concerns you brought up about jobs are concerns that all people have. You need a certain amount of money to exist in this society. You need a reasonably sane working situation. You need to know that when you're old the society won't discard you. That is a major concern, but that has nothing to do with what you actually do. If people put in an honest day's work doing something that's useful they should be paid the same as everybody else.

That shouldn't be a primary concern. What should be a primary concern is, well, in this case the fellow was interested in music and he wanted to do production work. We have lots of people doing production work. And that's something that he could do. I would guess that he would be more happy as an individual and have more sense of his own ability to --

MERROW: That is not the question. The question is are you going to make him unhappy by this kind of argument, if in fact he ends up as a mechanic?

HARWOOD: Well, the way the society sorts people and pegs people is a problem. What I am talking about is a way you could improve that problem. There are people who like mechanics. I mean that is just a fact of life. There are people who like to do a lot of things. I would guess that if you had a more natural sorting process and a more natural educational process, that the work would get done.

I mean, you just have to look at things like, look at existing communes, that is groups of sophisticated white, middle class people who have gone out into the country or into the city somewhere and decided to live self-sufficient lives. If you look at that experience, you'll find that if they do a consentual decision-making process about labor and they let people choose jobs that they like to do out of what's available, 80 or 90 percent of the jobs are taken care of automatically. It isn't that the massive amount of the work doesn't need to be done. If we've got a massive amount of work that nobody wants to do, I would guess that the work, number one, doesn't really need to be done, and number two, if it were kind of

worked around in a different way, might become something that people would want to do.

But I would guess that's the problem, not that we have to somehow shove people into the existing roles and make them like it and if we raise their expectations that they should be able to do something that makes sense to them, that we are somehow making a failure out of their lives. I would guess that that ought to be a real strong aim among people, to find something that they think is valuable and enjoy doing, to do as a job.

MERROW: And it's in the schools that those expectations ought to be nurtured.

HARWOOD: This business of sorting the school out from everything else that goes on in the world, I would guess that television is a more powerful educational influence than the school, just for instance. And I would guess that, I don't know, 75 or 80 percent of the education of the average person takes place outside the school.

Sure, the school does this and the school does that and so does the rest of society and so does television, so does the church, so does a lot of things. But you can't really sort it out and say the school does it. The school only reflects societal values, the way I see it. You know, basically, it is like Richard Nixon, you get the kind of President that you want and when you get tired of him, you get rid of him. That's just the fact of life.

MERROW: I wonder if you're implying that somehow it's time that we either got rid of schools or really redesign them radically.

HARWOOD: Well, see, that is what I am saying. Schools grew up. They started in ancient Greece about 2,500 years ago and then they were sort of imported here from Europe. And they served a certain function in a certain context and they have outlived their usefulness. There's still a role for the schools and there are still things that institutional structures can do for us to aid us in raising our children.

Another thing, you see, is that we think about schools as pertaining only to young people. I think that we need to set up educational structures which are available to everyone in a community through their whole lives and address their major work, recreational, and intellectual needs, you know, and that are non-age specific. Eighty-year old people sometimes want to learn how to keep books or work on their cars just the same as 12-year old kids do. We bag it all into these little structures and if you're not 12 years old, haven't passed the fifth grade, don't live in the district, et cetera, you can't get in.

You know, that is it. People don't seem to fit into the structures that we've made. And the structures that we've made don't seem to produce the kind of educational products that we want, that is the people aren't particularly happy with their educations. Their educations don't particularly suit them to do the work that we seem to need done. It just doesn't work. I think we need to rethink the whole set of assumptions.

MERROW: And you can't ask the structures to rethink and you can't ask the structures to ask the question of whether they should exist.

HARWOOD: No. The structures like things just about like they are.

I mean the people who are working within the schools are pretty much trying to keep them going the way they are going. They understand that system. They understand the pay scales and the unions and the buildings. They are pretty well locked into their set of operating policies. I don't think change is going to come from either inside the schools or inside the colleges of education. They have too much invested in the present system.

BLAIR: William Harwood of the New Schools Exchange. This clearinghouse for ideas in alternative education is run by Harwood, his wife Grace, and a number of other people from their farm in Pettigrew, Arkansas. Their farm, like the New Schools Exchange, is a communal operation.

MERROW: And I suppose that his observations about sharing work responsibilities grow out of his own experience there. But we should point out that most research about intentional communities indicates that these groups usually break up and disappear within a few years. So, attractive as that argument for work sharing may sound, I'm afraid that it wouldn't wash with corporate or government efficiency experts.

Bill raises another interesting point about the tracking or grouping of dumb kids and smart kids. The research indicates that sorting is not only on the basis of high or low achievement. In fact, 40 percent of the scholastically unsuccessful but well-to-do high school kids go on to college. While only 10 percent of the scholastically and economically poor students enter college.

BLAIR: That young McDonalds waitress said that working is part of a teenager's life and that seems to be born out by the numbers of kids holding down part-time jobs and going to school. Whether part-time work has any affect, beneficial or otherwise, on performance in school is something we know very little about. But part-time work unquestionably does influence subsequent career choices, either because people get accustomed to doing what they are already doing or they learn that that particular job is not for them.

This question of how people make career choices is just one of the concerns addressed in a new book by former Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz. In "The Boundless Resource," Wirtz suggests that young workers who enter the job market each year might have more success if they had better information about possible options and if their career counselling were more realistic and more personal. NPR reporter Barbara Newman asks Wirtz what prompted him to turn his attention to the problems of education and work.

WIRTZ: I suppose a couple of things, most particularly the realization, and I suspect as much as a parent as anything else the realization that I think we are only about a year and a half away now from another showdown, if you will, between the generations. We are training all these kids. They are working their heads off on more sharply and sharply defined objectives and what we know and haven't told them yet is that a lot of those opportunities simply aren't going to be there. We have got to start doing something about that.

NEWMAN: Well, there are different problems of attrition and expectations. One is of people who are in high school who expect to go into trades and others in college who expect to go into professions. The job market for both is shrinking.

WIRTZ: Yes. When we started the book unemployment was only about

five percent. It has almost doubled since that time. We had to change gears in the middle of what we were doing, realizing that it's just an awful mistake to hold out prospects which aren't there. And so there is the question, not just whether there are going to be jobs for the kids, but whether there are going to be jobs for enough people in this country. I don't think there will be unless we change both our approach to the relationship of education and work and probably our whole idea of growth.

I guess I don't think that this country is ever going to be fully employed again as long as we hold with the old gross national product as the measure of what we are up to. We are going to have to find a new meaning of growth and the point of the title of the book, "The Boundless Resource" is that although we may be running out of natural resources in this country and in the world, there is one infinite resource, that is the human resource. And if we can more fully develop and use the talents that are inside people, if we can start thinking more about the quality of life than about these things that "grossest" national product measures, then I think we find the prospect for limitless growth and for real full employment.

NEWMAN: How do we do that?

WIRTZ: It's not going to be easy. It would have been so much easier to write this book if there were a single law to be proposed or something that the nation could do through the federal government. I don't think there is. We have come to the conclusion that the only honest answer as far as these questions are concerned is to start back at the local community, if you will, to start dealing with these problems on a smaller scale in terms that we in our own communities can handle, to find out what people there can do, what needs to be done in those communities, and then to start working from those smaller accomplishment toward some broader policy.

NEWMAN: What are we going to educate people for? You know, given a shrinking base of jobs, both professional and blue collar, I guess that is my question -- and how are we going to educate them for them and who shall we educate? Who shall we select?

WIRTZ: Those are fair questions, and the answers are hard answers. So let's just start with two or three specifics. Let's start first with the fact that we are wasting right now billions and billions of dollars in this country by not tying education and work in together. Let's talk about some of the specific elements in that.

Let's talk about the cost to which we are going right now to train people for things that aren't going to be there. Let's just take that cost, that present cost, and start using part of it to identify what in every community can be done and needs to be done. It is what the economists call structural unemployment. But to a considerable extent these things can be done on a transfer of present cost basis.

But let me take a more drastic illustration. Everytime we make a mistake as far as one of these kids is concerned with the result that either he or she goes out unprepared for something or other, we have tried to figure the costs to the community of that one mistake. It is probably in the neighborhood of $150,000 per mistake. I mean in the institutional costs that result from that. I mean in dope, in drugs and in that kind of thing. We have got to start looking at some of these specifics.

NEWMAN: Well, you are proposing that we structure, we plan ahead as to what jobs will exist and where the opportunities will be and then prepare people for those jobs. How are you going to pick who gets into what?

WIRTZ: I don't think we can pick. It is just against our nature to line up a bunch of priorities of that kind. What we can do is just make it perfectly clear to all of them what the prospects are and then let them make those decisions. It would be possible in every community in this country to say pretty clearly what the prospects are in various occupations in this community over the next five year period. I would not pick and choose. I would simply provide that information and then let those individuals shape their training and educational careers around those prospects. They've got pretty good sense if they just know the facts.

NEWMAN: What about the surfeit of people going to college? Statistics say now there are ten million people in college and university and by 1990 only 20 percent of the jobs will require college training. What do we do about that?

WIRTZ: Well, we have got to make a pretty hard choice on that. First, I think we've got to ask ourselves how many of those kids are going to college just because we as parents are so insistent that they get something that some of us didn't have. There are a lot of them who would much rather not follow that course and who are being forced into it simply as a kind of reflection of a status aspiration on the part of parents. So I would stop that kind of thing. I would recognize, too, that it very well may be that that college education is going to be important for other than the performance of specific jobs.

I suppose there isn't any question but that we are perhaps, in our emphasis on vocational education, emphasizing the job training element too much. It is a nice prospect that a person might be what we have called a blue collar worker and still enjoy all the advantages that come from a general education. But I think we've got to stop this almost blind insistence that everybody ought to go on to college.

NEWMAN: I was going to ask you that in terms of you say that we have to train people for meaningful jobs, jobs that do exist, and tailor education much more to the work place. But what is the function of education in terms of instilling some values in people?

WIRTZ: Well, it goes a good deal beyond. The function of education is obviously a good deal more than training them just for work. We have started talking about two worlds of education and work. Well, there is really only one world. It ought to be called life. And we ought to start fitting these things together. We have got to start directing more of our education at the improvement of leisure and these other things.

So it would be the worse mistake to think that the only purpose of education is to prepare for work. I think of education as a value in itself, of learning as a value in itself. We've got to think in those terms. That is the important distinction between this phrase "career education" and "vocational education". I've great trouble with the concept of vocational education as such. There seems to be a much larger attraction in a fuller recognition that part of the purpose of education is training for a whole career, which includes work as an important part of it, but

also includes the improvement of leisure.

NEWMAN: Boy, with these proposals you are going to have to get rid of most of the teachers. You are going to have to educate people to teach in a whole different way.

WIRTZ: Well, those are two different things. No, I don't think it involves getting rid of teachers. To the contrary, as we envisage the larger role of education, particularly in connection with the adult experience, it ought to mean a good deal more education. But on the second part of your point as to whether it will mean a different kind of teaching, by all means, yes.

Drawing on some 25 years of teaching myself, I expect that I feel that there is going to have to be a very real change in teachers' orientation toward the purpose of education. We just don't realize how much we got into the habit of making so much of education just training for more education, for college and then for graduate school. Yes, I think it does mean a very marked change in a recognition of the function of teaching.

I've seen the bureaucracies now of government, of corporation and of teaching. I'm under no illusions about the inertial forces in the educational system. It does seem to me that, particularly at the high school level, there is an inertial professional force there that is tied in with the credentialing, which would be the worse mistake to take into account. But I believe both the prospects of larger accomplishment and the pressures of present circumstance are going to make the teachers of this country quite willing to think along lines which tie education and work more closely together.

NEWMAN: If you were a teacher now, addressing a class, could you assume that role and talk to the students and say, in terms of what they should expect from life, in terms of the integration of education and employment, and also what they should expect on the job market and in terms of leisure?

WIRTZ: I guess I would suggest to them first that it is necessary to think in terms of the immediate necessity of earning a living. But I would move pretty fast past that. I would urge them first to buckle down to the preparation of themselves for particular occupations, but then I'd move pretty quickly to going on beyond that.

I'd tell them they'd better learn how to read and they'd better learn how to write, and they'd better learn how to add and subtract and multiply. I would tell them that we are worried about the fact that these college aptitude scores are going on down all the time. They are not buckling down to it. I guess I would try to say two things to them. One is: for gosh sake get ready for this pretty tough prospect that faces us. Realize that we don't know where about ten million jobs that we are going to need are coming from. Take all of that into account, but for the love of Pete, make something of your life beyond just what the job is going to be.

NEWMAN: I hate to put myself in this position. But do you feel at all quixotic about this?

WIRTZ: Quixotic, no; idealistic, yes. I guess I think it is high time that we start moving in this country toward a politics of idealism

of one sort or another that does set out the broader purpose we have in mind. But if your question implies, as it does, and very properly, that it is going to be a very tough piece of business, with the country down in the mouth and with the economy in bad shape, to improve any single part of the whole process, that is right. If your question implies, as it should, that it's going to be very hard to do this at a local community level, that is right. It is so much easier to do things or to talk about things on a national level.

NEWMAN: You know, I just keep thinking about my experiences with very bright people who were blue collar workers, who got married very young and went on assembly lines because that's where they made the most money, $15,000. They were 19 years old and they had kids already. They were frustrated, you know, that feeling of almost going out of your skin, but they had obligations and they just couldn't do it.

You, in your book, talk about the unemployment statistics between people in the 16 to 21-year old categories as 20 percent and for Black people it's 40 percent. These are people who aren't having jobs, who have very little to look forward to. The job market is shrinking at least right now. How are they going to think in terms of spiritual renovation and planning for a quality life in education?

WIRTZ: Well, you go very directly to the heart of this whole problem and so insistently that it is very hard to put down the suggestion of asking what you would do about it in the alternative. Now that is not a fair answer, except as it reflects this fact, that unless we are ready to give up, unless we are willing to admit that there are limits to growth, that there are always going to be this many unemployed people around, we've got to try to find some hard answers. I almost have to bite my tongue to keep from offering the easy answer. That easy answer would be for the government to create another million jobs a year, the government as the employer of last resort.

In my book, to talk along those lines, is to talk about taking a shortcut across quicksand. It's simply absurd that both the administration and the opposition in the federal government today are talking solely in those terms. I don't know whether it's going to be possible to find another form of growth in this country that is based on the development of the natural resources in the fuller use. I don't know. I know that if there isn't that answer then we have had it. I refuse to separate those possibilities. So I find in the prospect of people in local communities taking the problems as they are presented there and dealing with their own children and their own families, we will find answers that aren't available in any other terms. But if the question is whether there is any certitude about this answer, there is not.

NEWMAN: Now suppose we do have certain, let's call it underclass or unemployed population and increasing technology means that people with certain limited skills, technocrats, will be given more power and the job market will be shrinking as technology proceeds, you said before if we don't do something about these people in improving their lot, we have had it. Why have we had it? Why won't we just have people who are just not as lucky as other people?

WIRTZ: If I understand what you are saying, you are saying why don't

we just settle for about ten million unemployed people a year?

NEWMAN: Yes.

WIRTZ: No, I don't think we can do that. Perhaps we will be forced to. I don't believe it. I think it is just contrary to everything that's in us. The fact that I can't find a patented answer in easy form for it doesn't dissuade me from the course of trying to look for one. I believe that unless we grow we die, either as individuals or as a society. So, I can't settle for ten million people out of work or twenty million.

NEWMAN: Philosophically, right, morally?

WIRTZ: No, no, practically.

NEWMAN: Why practically?

WIRTZ: Look, all it would take would be a war and then all the questions you have asked would be automatically answered. We would find the money for war. There would be full employment. All those things would work as they always have before. I just believe that we've got the genius in us to recognize the crisis and the demands on us in some form other than that. I simply think that if we set out to do affirmatively the things we need to do in this country, we would find the same answers that we do whenever a war pressures us to those.

NEWMAN: Well, what we really have to do to enact your scenario in terms of matching people with employment is to have some kind of very good statistical compilation and projection of where the jobs are going to be.

WIRTZ: That won't be enough, but I'd sure start from there. Because there are lots of situations and lots of communities in this country, especially if you include services of kinds other than those which we have previously recognized, that are very much in need of doing. And so the statistical base, the measurements base is an important one. But I'm under no illusion that simply getting better figures is going to mean an increase of ten million jobs.

NEWMAN: No, I'm just trying to say if you're going to fill them you have to know where they are.

WIRTZ: That is right. That is important starting point.

NEWMAN: The second thing is: you say that you wouldn't channel people into jobs specifically. You would tell them, look, we have an X quota here. But you still might have too many people of free-will voluntarily going into the wrong areas.

WIRTZ: Yes, you may. There are other economies in other countries in which they do precisely what is suggested by the question, in which they simply direct particular people along specific routes. It's against our nature to do that. That carries planning further than we are willing to do it. In making that choice, it is fairly easy for me to say that if we simply provide full information, that is about as far as we can go. I would not like the idea of the government saying that my son or daughter

is to be trained to follow a particular course. But I'd like not to lose the first part of that question. It is just absolutely imperative that we do no grading of opportunities according to previous condition of parents, servitude or disadvantageor something of that kind.

NEWMAN: But that's even, without even writing that out, guidance counselors kind of psychologically predestine people into those tracks.

WIRTZ: Yes, the present guidance and counseling thing is terribly wrong. Of course, it used to be done by the family. About 20 years ago the family opted out. Not it's being done by high school guidance counselors who had their experience in preparing and sending kids on to college. There is just almost no career guidance and counseling at the high school level today.

NEWMAN: But then again you wonder. You say the function of schools should be to educate people for life and to have a closer relationship with employment and you look at some studies done by people like Christopher Jencks and he says that you can't even tell what makes a good school and then other people like Coleman say that it's the family that's the predeterminant of educational success. It is hard to figure out really what the schools should do.

WIRTZ: Yes. I don't think the school can do it alone. I do think that the role of the family, which used to be so important, has diminished in importance and should be restored. But my reaction to that would be that to whatever extent Christopher Jencks and Jim Coleman are right, that there isn't anything that the schools alone can do about it. That only increases the necessity of developing at the local community level some form of structure which permits the public, if you will, the parents and so forth, to get back into the picture. My answer would be, in response to your question, that only part of this can be done by the schools. I think we are going to find the necessity of redeveloping the whole idea of local communities because I do think it's a job which neither the kids nor the schools can meet alone.

NEWMAN: Thank you very much, Willard Wirtz, former Secretary of the United States Department of Labor and author of a new book, "The Boundless Resource." I'm Barbara Newman.

BLAIR: Wirtz's book, "The Boundless Resource" calls for the creation of community education counseling in 25 places around the country, so that local people can devise work-education programs. Students would be required to take at least five hours a year of career counseling and adults would be encouraged to make more use of the schools. One option suggested is that students might take a year or two off for work between the ages of 16 and 20.

MERROW: Bill Harwood of the New Schools Exchange, and now Willard Wirtz, are coming at this complex issue from totally different perspectives, and yet they share some common ideas -- like the importance of community, the powerful inertial force of bureaucracy, and the impossibility of schools fixing things by themselves. Wirtz used the expression, "career education", a relatively new approach to closing the work-education gap.

Next week we'll talk to several teachers who are trying to make young people aware of career opportunities and work responsibilities. I'll also talk with Walter Davis, education director of the AFL-CIO and Paul Barton, executive director of the National Manpower Institute. And we

may even venture a few solutions to our own question: "Schooling and Jobs -- Can You Get There from Here?"

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